said: "I see you have heard of the present Duke."

"I read of the tragedy that occurred to his family when they were drowned at sea," Luella replied.

"It was in our newspapers too," Signor Vecchio remarked. "Naturally I was interested because young Captain Stone, now the Duke, had succeeded to such an important position." He hesitated as if he was feeling for words before he said: "I tried to persuade Tia to join her husband,but she refused."

"They had not been divorced?" Luella enquired.

"Signor Vecchio threw out his hands. "Who can obtain a divorce in England when it has to go before Parliament?" he asked. "And Tia was a Catholic. As far as she was concerned, she had made a vow to be married to one man and one man only." He spoke dramatically.

Luella felt embarrassed that she had asked such a question.

Then almost as if he was speaking to himself, Signor Vecchio went on: "Now that Tia is dead, her son's proper place is with his father. He must be brought up to inherit the position which will be his by right."

Now Luella could understand the point of the story.

However, before she could say anything, Signor Vecchio added: "I want you to take Enrico to England and make sure his father welcomes him and accepts him as his son and heir."

There was silence.

Then Luella said hesitatingly: "Surely . . it is . . strange that the Duke has not . . seen his child since he . . was born. It would seem that he is . . not very interested in him."

"I am afraid once the two young people were no longer in love with each other, they began to lead separate lives," Signor Vecchio explained in a lofty tone. "But now that Tia is dead, I am quite sure the Duke will realise where his duty lies."

"And . . you want . . me to take the . . little boy to . . England?" Luella asked.

"I would be extremely grateful if you will do so," Signor Vecchio replied. "I would have taken him myself, but I am so extremely busy here in Milan that it is impossible for me to get away." He paused for a moment and then continued: "I also feel it would be best for him to be taken by somebody who is English rather than Italian."

"Would he not be . . happier with . . someone he . . knows?" Luella ventured.

"He is a charming child – charming!" Signor Vecchio assured her, "as I am sure you will find when you meet him. And as you are anxious to go back to England, what could be a better arrangement?" He thought for a moment, then he said: "Naturally, as you will be undertaking such an important mission, I will send a courier with you."

Luella drew in her breath. She had been trying to think how she could refuse the Signor's suggestion. Now, almost as if in answer to her prayer, she was to be looked after on the journey. She could not be nervous with a courier to escort her.

As if the Signor was following her thoughts, he said: "I know of an elderly courier who has travelled to England on a number of occasions. He will look after you and little Enrico and see there are no difficulties